

Social Host FAQ

1. Q: Why do we need a Social Host Bill? Aren't there enough laws to address underage drinking?

A: A Social Host Bill would allow counties to enact local social host ordinances. Currently only cities have the authority to enact such an ordinance. Counties that want to implement a social host ordinance must have a local representative petition the legislature. This Bill would make it so all counties can enact this ordinance without petitioning legislature. While there are several laws that address underage drinking, there is nothing that allows law enforcement to address underage drinking parties that are occurring on private property. A Social Host Bill will be tool to aid law enforcement in closing that gap.

2. Q: Wouldn't a Social Host Bill infringe on personal property rights?

A: A Social Host Bill is another example of an adult law that is meant to help keep kids safe. While Montana law does make provisions for parents or legal guardians to allow their children to consume small amounts of alcohol on their private property, this does not include providing alcohol or allowing other youths to consume alcohol on their property. One Montana youth compared it to illegal drug use; "it doesn't matter if you are on your personal property, you still don't have the right to use illegal drugs. Alcohol is an illegal drug for youth under 21 years of age. Therefore, holding adults accountable for the act of providing a location for underage drinking is no more of an infringement on personal rights than holding adults accountable for any other crime that they commit on their personal property."

3. Q: Is there any proof that a Social Host Bill helps reduce underage drinking?

A: In Montana, Helena, Billings and Great Falls currently have social host ordinances. All were adopted in 2009, therefore very little data has been collected to show how effective they have been. However, other states with ordinances have shown significant success. Ventura County, CA is one such area. Law enforcement reports that the size and number of underage alcohol parties has decreased, and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows that youth access to alcohol is decreasing. One of the most notable statistics is that the recidivism rate shows that only 4% of individuals cited for social hosting have been charged a second time.

4. Q: What is the big deal if we let kid drink? We did it as kids and we turned out fine.

A: Many adults feel that it is hypocritical for them to tell their kids they cannot drink because they did it as a youth. The fact of the matter is that kids today do not drink just a few beers at a party or social gathering. Most kids today are drinking with the intent to "get wasted." They drink as much as they can as fast as they can. We also know more about how alcohol affects the young brain than we ever did, and research shows that youth who drink alcohol to the point of being drunk before the age of 15 are five times as likely to become alcohol dependent than those who wait to drink until 21. MRI imaging has also shown that there is marked decreased activity in the brain of youth who consume alcohol as opposed to youth who do not.